

UNDERSTANDING SPECIALISED COMMISSIONING FROM APRIL 2013

Q: What are specialised services?

Specialised services are those which cannot sensibly be planned, procured and provided at a local level, typically covering a population of more than one million people. Specialised services matter to everyone. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 enables the Secretary of State for Health to prescribe (specialised) services to be commissioned directly by NHS England having regard to:

- the number of individuals who require the provision of the service or facility
- the cost of providing the service or facility
- the number of persons able to provide the service or facility
- the financial implications for clinical commissioning groups if they were required to arrange for the provision of the service or facility.

Collectively, specialised services treat **hundreds of thousands of patients every year**. Many specialised services provide for people with rare genetic disorders, while anyone might need to call upon others, such as those for spinal injuries and serious burns. In April 2013, NHS England became the sole direct commissioner of all specialised services, with a related budget of some £12 billion.

Q: How did commissioning of specialised services change in April 2013?

NHS England now develops specialised service policies nationally. These specify the services patients can expect to receive and where they will be provided. They also set out what high cost treatments NHS England will or won't routinely fund.

10 of NHS England's 27 Area Teams **implement these national policies at a local level**, managing contracts with their providers on behalf of all patients in England.

It is intended that **services should broadly be uniform across England**. As NHS England is the sole statutory commissioner of specialised services, variation in access to treatments could be liable to legal challenge.

Q: Why will specialised services be commissioned in this way?

Specialised services are best planned at larger population levels. Funding of specialised services from local budgets previously led to unacceptable local variation in access to treatments and fragmentation of expertise in commissioning these services.

The most complex services benefit from **centralisation and specialisation** of care, with higher numbers of procedures offered in a smaller number of centres, so that clinical expertise can be developed to **enhance patient safety and outcomes**.

National commissioning, with a consolidated budget, can enable sensible planning of these services **for local people, wherever they live**.

Q: What advice will NHS England receive on these services?

NHS England's Medical Directorate hosts advisory bodies called Clinical Reference Groups for the development of **multidisciplinary advice on specific specialised services**.

Clinical Reference Groups are clinically led, comprising 12 clinicians in addition to a clinical Chair, alongside commissioners, professional organisations and patient input. 74 of these groups cover the entirety of specialised services and are expected to play an increasingly important role in policy development for services and treatments.

Q: How can users of specialised services get their voices heard?

Patient engagement is vital in specialised services. Ensuring that the views of small, dispersed patient populations are heard and acted upon has been a longstanding challenge. To meet this objective, the Alliance recommends that:

- NHS England should be setting out plans to capture patients' views of its directly commissioned services as part of its core business, as well as through stakeholder input to the Clinical Reference Groups
- Information about services and those responsible for commissioning them should be made freely available on NHS England's websites and elsewhere
- Health and Wellbeing Boards will have NHS England representatives in attendance and will need to be aware of specialised services in raising patients' concerns directly
- Healthwatch is intended to gather patients' views locally but needs to conduct **national oversight through Healthwatch England for specialised services**

Opportunities

- Uniform, clinically-led standards of service across England
- A levelling-up of service quality on the basis of best practice
- Greater efficiency through NHS England as the sole specialised commissioner
- The alignment of resource and expertise in specialised commissioning
- Long-term planning and service transformation objectives made easier by a national approach
- Opportunity for NHS England to lead by example through specialised commissioning

Challenges

- Risk that service quality levels down rather than up
- Clear need to avoid fragmentation by integrating specialised with other services for patients
- Inadequate scrutiny of NHS England in its powerful new role
- Lower management allowances mean that commissioning capacity is significantly pressured
- Need for Clinical Reference Groups to be established on a robust footing with real patient and public involvement in co-design

Further information is available at: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/d-com/spec-serv/>

The Specialised Healthcare Alliance is a coalition of 86 patient-related organisations, supported by 13 corporate members, which campaigns on behalf of people with rare and complex conditions. To contact us, please email eng@shca.info.